

Speech on the House Floor Concerning Faith Based Institutions during discussion of the Job Training Improvement Act of 2005

March 2, 2005

Congressman Luis G. Fortuño (PR)

Mr. Chairman, the discussion today is really about protecting the mission of those religious organizations that some of the Members here are proposing that we regulate even further in spite of the wonderful job they are doing to work with our social ills. It is also about preserving the strength and integrity of religious organizations that engage in this type of social work. It is not a license we are looking for to impose particular religious beliefs, but a guarantee to protect the administrative integrity that is part of each religious group that engages in this type of work.

Faith-based and community-based organizations are far better suited than a government bureaucracy to address these issues and produce results. Key to their success is a unifying roll they often play in their communities, as well as their proximity to individuals and communities in need.

This is especially true, I must say, of the Hispanic American population. Hispanic Americans traditionally, in following their traditional values and beliefs, often turn to faith-based and community organizations for help. By channeling social services through these organizations, we can avoid losing members of this community in our society.

However, what some today are trying to do here is essentially trying to tell them whom they can hire and whom they cannot hire. I know of different programs actually as we speak here in Washington, D.C. I have a group of six or seven ministers from the northwestern part of Puerto Rico that are visiting with us today, and they have been doing, for a number of years, a wonderful job in terms of working with our younger population. No one from Washington, I repeat, no one from Washington, has a right to tell them whom they can hire and whom they cannot hire. When a faith-based group hires employees on a religious basis, they are exercising their civil liberties. No one from Washington will take that away from them. If denied the right to staff their programs on a religious basis, employees of religious organizations not sharing the religious organization's faith could end up suing to tear down religious art or symbols and perhaps even its religious sounding name.

What is really happening here is there are some people who do not believe that these organizations should be performing the job they are performing.

I ask everyone here to oppose the amendment that has been introduced.

